In 1988, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure authorized FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. This effective program provides grants to communities to mitigate hazards, but only provides grants to ''build better'' after a disaster. At the time, no program existed to help communities mitigate risks from all hazards before disaster strikes.

In the 1990s, under the leadership of FEMA Administrator James Lee Witt, FEMA developed a pre-disaster mitigation pilot program known as ''Project Impact''. Congress appropriated funds for Project Impact in each of fiscal years 1997 through 2001. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure first authorized the current Pre-Disaster Mitigation program in the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000.

The PDM program reduces the risk of natural hazards, which is where the preponderance of risk is in our country. The devastating ice storms that struck the middle of the United States (including Missouri, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Kentucky) earlier this year and the floods currently on the Red River in the Midwest are examples of the tragic, real impact of natural disasters that occur in our nation every year. Over the last decade, natural disasters have cost our nation an average of nearly $30 billion per year.

Mitigation has been proven to save money. Studies by the Congressional Budget Office and National Institute of Building Sciences show that for every dollar spent on pre-disaster mitigation projects, future losses are reduced by three to four dollars. In 2005, the Mutihazard Mitigation Council, an advisory body of the National Institute of Building Sciences, found ''that a dollar spent on mitigation saves society an average of $4.'' The Council found that flood mitigation measures yield even greater savings. According to a September 2007 CBO report on the reduction in Federal disaster assistance that is likely to result from the PDM program, ''on average, future losses are reduced by about $3 (measured in discounted present value) for each $1 spent on those projects, including both federal and nonfederal spending.''

While empirical data is critical, perhaps more telling are real-life mitigation ''success stories''. One of the best examples of mitigation is the town of Valmeyer, Illinois. The town was devastated by the great flood of 1993. With $45 million in Federal, state, and local funding, the town relocated to bluffs 400 feet above the site of the former town. When faced with floods last year, the residents of that town were out of harm's way, as the Chicago Tribune reported in a story aptly titled ''Valmeyer Illinois—Soaked in '93, Town now High and Dry''. The June 19, 2008 story quotes an 86-year old resident named Elenora Anderson. Her home was destroyed by the 1993 flood but as she said, ''I'm sure glad I don't have to worry now that we're high enough here on the hill.''

This month, we have seen the communities of North Dakota and my home state of Minnesota damaged by floods. Many of these same communities were devastated by floods in 1997. However, because of mitigation after the 1997 floods, the communities face far less risk. Even before this year's floods, mitigation investments had paid off. For example, in Grand Forks, after the 1997 floods, FEMA spent $23 million to acquire vulnerable homes in the flood plain. In 2006, a flood came within two feet of the 1997 flood level, and according to FEMA, the 1997 mitigation investment saved $24.6 million. That investment represents a return of 107 percent after just one flood.

Another success story comes from Story County, Iowa. There, six homes that had been flooded in 1990, 1993, and 1996 were bought out with $549,662 in FEMA mitigation grants. In 1998 when a flood struck again, FEMA estimates that $541,900 in damages to the homes was avoided. This mitigation project paid for itself in just one flood, and the estimated savings do not include the costs of warning, rescue, or evacuation.

Mitigation is an investment. It is an investment that not only benefits the Federal Government, but state and local governments as well. Projects funded by the PDM program reduce the damage that would be paid for by the Federal Government and state and local governments in a Major Disaster under the Stafford Act. However, mitigation also reduces the risks from smaller, more frequent, events that state and local governments face every day, as not every storm, fire, or flood warrants the assistance of the Federal Government.

The Pre-Disaster Mitigation program, through property improvements, takes citizens out of harm's way, by elevating a house, or making sure a hospital can survive a hurricane or earthquake. In doing so, it allows first responders to focus on what is unpredictable in a disaster rather than on what is foreseeable and predictable.

H.R. 1746 reauthorizes the PDM program for three years, at a level of $250 million for each of fiscal years 2010 through 2012. The bill increases the minimum amount that each State can receive under the program from $500,000 to $575,000, and codifies the competitive selection process of the program as currently administered by FEMA.

The bill also eliminates the existing sunset in the program. As the evidence clearly shows, this program works well and is cost effective. It should no longer be treated as a pilot program with a sunset. Rather, state and local governments should have the certainly of knowing this program will be available in the future so they can conduct vital longer-term mitigation planning.

Last year, the House passed a virtually identical bill, H.R. 6109, but the other body did not take action on this bill. While a one-year extension was included in the Department of Homeland Security Fiscal Year 2009 Appropriations Act to keep this vital program alive, Congress must act. If we do not, this worthy program will sunset on September 30, 2009.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 1746, the ''Pre-Disaster Mitigation Act of 2009''.

H.R. 1747, THE GREAT LAKES ICEBREAKER REPLACEMENT ACT

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 26, 2009

Mr. OBERSTAR. Madam Speaker, I today introduce H.R. 1747, the ''Great Lakes Icebreaker Replacement Act''. U.S. industries in the heartland of the United States are totally dependent on Great Lakes icebreakers to keep them supplied with raw materials during the winter months. Without them, steel mills would shut down for want of iron ore and electrical generation would halt for want of the coal necessary to power generators. People could not just lose their jobs—but their lives.

During the 2006–2007 winter season, transportation of 10,400,000 tons of iron ore on the Great Lakes supported 100,000 jobs at Minnesota and Michigan iron ore mines and lower Lakes steel mills and 300,000 jobs at supplier industries. That same winter, 6,400,000 tons of coal were shipped on the Great Lakes to keep the region supplied with electricity. However, we don't have the icebreaking capacity on the Great Lakes that we have had historically. During the spring of 2008, U.S.-flag vessels operating on the Great Lakes suffered more than $1.3 million in damages to their hulls because the Coast Guard did not have sufficient assets to keep the shipping lanes open.

People who are not from the Great Lakes region probably do not realize that there is ice on the Lakes and their interconnecting channels from early December until April. Some years, the Coast Guard has been breaking ice in the St. Mary's river until mid-May. Think of these icebreakers as the snow plows for Great Lakes shipping. It is the Federal Government's responsibility to keep these marine highways open so the needs of the public can be met.

In 2006, the Coast Guard took delivery of the new icebreaker MACKINAW. Unlike the old MACKINAW, this vessel is a combined buoytender-icebreaker so that it can execute Coast Guard missions year-round. Five of the Coast Guard's icebreakers on the Lakes are close to the end of their useful lives. Further, the buoytenders on the Lakes are having difficulty breaking ice of the thickness that is commonly found on the Lakes.

The $153 million authorized in H.R. 1747 authorizes the funding to build a sister ship to the MACKINAW. The design of the MACKINAW is proven and the vessel has shown that is it up to the job of breaking ice on the Lakes during the winter and tending buoys during the spring, summer and fall months. Not only will this funding ensure that our nation's vital industries are supplied during the winter—construction of this icebreaker will create jobs at U.S. shipyards and the related supplier industries at a time when job creation is so vital to an economy losing some 600,000 jobs per month.

For all of these reasons, it is critically important that we provide the Coast Guard with the resources necessary to build a replacement icebreaker for the Great Lakes region.

TRANSPORTATION BUDGET AUTHORITY IN THE FY 2010 BUDGET RESOLUTION

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 26, 2009

Mr. OBERSTAR. Madam Speaker, the Budget Resolution, as ordered reported last night by the House Committee on the Budget, provides a solid foundation for the surface transportation authorization act. I thank Chairman SPRATT and the Committee on the Budget for their leadership and vigorous support for transportation and infrastructure programs.